

MINUTES

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Commission Conference Call Meeting
1420 East 6th Avenue – Helena Headquarters
Helena, MT 59620
NOVEMBER 20, 2007**

Commission Members Present: Steve Doherty, Chairman; Shane Colton, Vice-Chairman; Dan Vermillion; Willie Doll.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Jeff Hagener, Director; Chris Smith, Chief of Staff; Larry Peterman, Chief of Field Operations; Bob Lane, FWP Legal Council; Jim Kropp, FWP Enforcement Division Administrator; Jeff Herbert, FWP Wildlife Division Assistant Administrator; Ken McDonald, FWP Wildlife Division Administrator; Quentin Kujala, FWP Wildlife Management Bureau Chief; Alan Charles, FWP Landowner Sportsman Coordinator; Ron Aasheim, FWP Communications & Education Division Administrator; Mike Korn, FWP Enforcement Division Assistant Administrator; Ray Mule', FWP Region 5 Wildlife Manager; Regena Peterson, FWP Commission Secretary.

Press Present: Scott McMillion and Mark Henkel.

Topics of Discussion:

- 1. Opening – Call to Order**
- 2. Season Extension for Antlerless Elk - Final**

1. Call to Order. Chairman Doherty called the conference call meeting to order at 1:15 p.m.

2. Season Extension for Antlerless Elk – Final. Director Hagener said that because mild weather conditions over the first four weeks of the hunting season have resulted in low harvest rates, FWP determined that elk hunting seasons needed to be extended in areas of large populations of elk. In spite of the significant snowfall received over the weekend, the Department still feels it is appropriate to implement some elk hunting season extensions. This proposal includes districts that are at objective or are less than 20% over objective, and would run no longer than Sunday, December 16, 2007. The Department requests that authority be delegated to the Director and District Commissioner, or Commission Chairman, to close districts upon 24-hour notice if harvest levels are deemed excessive or at objective. Check stations will not operate through this extension.

Districts proposed to allow antlerless elk harvest on an unused elk permit valid during the 2007 general season include: 101, 103, 104, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 130, 132, 140, 141, 210, 212, 213, 261, 270, 281, 283, 285, 290, 292, 302, 323-10 (Wall Creek WMA), 401, 412, 417, 420, 426, 441, 450, 620, 621, 622, 630, 631, 632, 680, 690. Of these, 401, 412, 417, 426 and 441 are also open for antlerless elk hunting by youth with only a general youth license. HD 415 is also open for antlerless elk hunting by youth with only a general youth license.

Districts proposed to allow antlerless elk harvest on an unused general elk license valid during the 2007 general season include: 300, 314, 315, 320, 322, 323 (off Wall Creek WMA), 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 330, 333, 390, 393, 411, 413, 416, 418, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425 (off Sun River WMA), 432, 442, 445, 446, 448, 449, 452, 454, 511, 530, 540, 580

Hunting districts 213, 292, 283, 411, 511, 530, 580, 680, 690 are also open for antlerless elk with unused antlerless elk A9/B12 license as previously drawn for the general season.

Hunting districts 413, 415, 416, 418, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425 (off Sun River WMA), 426, 432, 442, 446, 449, 450, 452, 454 are also open for antlerless elk with unused over-the-counter A9 licenses and B12 licenses on private and DNRC lands.

A great deal of dialogue followed the presentation of this proposal that pertained to the inclusion or exclusion of various hunting districts and EMUs, whether the extension should or should not include bulls, damage season issues, population management, etc. Bob Lane, FWP Legal Counsel, stated that the Commission has the authority to shorten, lengthen, open and close seasons.

Colton stated that he understood the reasoning for extending the season for antlerless only, however given the present weather conditions, he was unsure if it should be strictly antlerless. Landowners can place limitations on what is harvested on their land.

Hagener said the Department is striving for consistency. In areas where there are many bulls, they will be shot before the antlerless elk. The purpose of the extension is to target the reproductive segment.

Doll said with the mild weather in the Missouri Breaks area, hunters have already had the opportunity to harvest a bull – they have been available. He said he could understand an extension in mountainous areas, but not on the prairies. Ranchers have not complained about elk damage this year in his area.

Hagener stated that the purpose of this proposal was to provide general opportunity, however there are other management options available should the Commission choose to take no action at this time.

Doherty said extending the five-week season is an anomaly, and hopes it will not become a recurring pattern. He questioned whether extending the season is a good idea or if it will supplant a later damage hunt. Extending the season resembles a damage hunt, and he wants to avoid that perception.

Colton stated that establishing the five-week season was a big step toward controlling the resource, and this season extension is similar to the customized seasons that didn't work well in the past. There are districts that are well over objective, and going to straight antlerless is providing a damage hunt to those who don't qualify.

Vermillion suggested making general areas either sex. Colton agreed, saying that it would be available only to those who already have tags. They would have a longer period of time in which to hunt.

Doll favored either-sex in general areas, but not in permitted areas. Smaller bulls are passed up in search of a trophy bull. Hunters have had their opportunity to kill a bull - he does not feel they need an extension of time.

Hagener said the large bulls in areas like the Sun River will migrate out, and hunters will be poised to kill them en-masse. Several years ago a situation similar to this happened, and when 100 bulls migrated out, and the shooting stopped, only ten survived the carnage.

Hagener said it is difficult to enforce an array of different circumstances in each district. The Department has tried to plan it according to elk management units based on elk that are there. The harvest may be greater on public land because of access issues on private land. The 2008 regulations will be discussed at the December meeting.

Doherty said if this extension is approved, it has to be understood that it is a unique event and the public should not plan on it happening again. He agreed that bulls will be heavily sought after.

Kujala said the wildlife managers have expressed anxiety over including bulls, and are reluctant to include them. Monitoring is also difficult.

Herbert said to keep in mind that the season extension is geared toward population management where elk are over objective. Game damage issues are site specific.

Action: Doll moved and Vermillion seconded the motion to approve the 2007 season extension of no longer than three weeks for antlerless elk as proposed by the Department, and to delegate authority to the Director and District Commissioner or Commission Chairman to close any extended season upon 24 hour notice if conditions warrant.

Colton suggested removing the Sun River from this extension, and go with a management season if necessary, and extend the season for only two weeks. Further discussion ensued.

Doherty expressed concern about the enforcement aspect of the extension, how much it will cost, and what problems are anticipated.

Jim Kropp, FWP Enforcement Division Administrator, said other programs will be impacted, and additional comp time will increase costs. Wardens have been working the hunting season since mid-August, and they are tired. Wardens will have to fill in for other wardens, and it will take extra effort to get them in areas that need monitored. It is anticipated that there will be a fair amount of overkill in some areas, and elk may be pushed to public land. If it continues to stay cold, there will be large numbers of elk available, and winter range areas will require significant responses. Landowners requested enforcement assistance since the start of the season, and those requests will continue.

Action on Motion: Doll withdrew his motion and Vermillion withdrew his second to the motion.

Action: Colton moved and Doll seconded the motion to extend the season as recommended by the Department for the designated districts in Regions 1 and 2. Designated hunting districts in Regions 3, 4, 5, and 6 would be open under the same regulations in effect as of November 25, 2007 except antlerless only harvest will be allowed in HDs 412, 417, 426, 422, 424, 425, 442, and all 600 hunting districts. The extension is for two weeks ending December 9, 2007. The season can be closed in 24 hour notice by the Director and the District Commissioner or Commission Chair.

Action on Motion: Motion carried.

Action: It was moved and seconded to adjourn the conference call. Motion carried.

The conference call meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Steve Doherty, Chairman

Jeff Hagener, Director